

Minutes
Rowe School Committee

January 19th, 2012 at 6:00 P.M.
Rowe Elementary School

Present: Chair Bill Loomis, Lisa Danek Burke, Lisa Miller
Other Attendees: Bill Knittle, Rowe Principal; Paul McLatchy III, Minutes Taker
Audience of Citizens: Noel Abbott (arrived near the end of the meeting), Roberta Baker, Leonard Laffond, Jennifer Morse, Jeff Parent, Patricia Tierney

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order by Chair Loomis at 6:00 P.M.

Audience of Citizens: Chair Loomis turned to the audience to see if anybody had any questions or comments for the Committee. The audience members had none.

Principal's Report: Principal Knittle gave his monthly report, subjects as follows:

School Improvement Plan: Principal Knittle began by explaining the status of the goal "the District will offer students a broad range of learning opportunities". He said that each Monday the child support team (CST) meets to discuss students that may, for academic or social reasons, require intervention. He estimates that the CST has reviewed 40% of the students that will require intervention. With the Benchmark Assessment Test (BAT), they have records from each student. Next Monday will be the first meeting in a while.

He asked Ms. Baker and Ms. Tierney (who have served on the CST) if every child had been tracked in the past, or if this was a new thing for this year. Ms. Baker said that they have been looked at in the past, and looked at all students to see where students fell and if they needed attention.

The next goal was "the students will meet state and district learning standards on the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks and the district curriculum." The BAT and StarMath (SM) will be used to meet this goal. The BAT was administered in September and will be done again in January. It is used to ensure that students will be at an appropriate reading level, which is done by having a child read to a teacher who evaluates their abilities. This works well with existing reading programs.

The State has put out a new teacher and administration evaluation program that will be put in place over the next year and a half. There will need to be a second assessment used to track student test scores within the classroom. The school will see if SM will meet the requirements, or if another will be needed.

Ms. Miller said that Superintendent Buoniconti was at a meeting in Greenfield about that, and they will hope to hear more about it. Principal Knittle said it would be more work from an evaluation standpoint, but it would be "richer" than what they've been doing.

Americorp: There are now two Americorp volunteers in the classrooms every Wednesday. The students appear to like them. They are still getting their "sea legs", but Principal Knittle said the teachers have

been very helpful. They are focusing on the environment and science, which the students appear to enjoy. They will begin working on a new project, which has yet to be determined.

Tools of the Mind: Principal Knittle asked Ms. Baker (the Preschool teacher) to speak on a new program called "Tools of the Mind" (TOTM).

Ms. Baker explained that she had seen the program "in action", and that it appears to be an excellent program. However, it has a price tag of time, actual funds, and training. She said that it empowers the children to work cooperatively, and teaches them to self-regulate. It gives them the tools to monitor themselves and interact with one another.

It does take two years of training and requires someone to come out and observe, many workshops, and a lot of time. But, to Ms. Baker, she said it seems very worthwhile. Ms. Tierney said that the key part is that it is giving the children a social structure to interact in a positive way, and to regulate their impulses. If children are not coming to school with these skills, they need to be taught. She said it was very different than teaching them how to read and write.

Ms. Baker said that many students are coming to preschool without such skills, and this program may help to replace some special educational needs in the future by providing important skills.

There is consideration that other schools may join, which would increase the likelihood of a training program in the area, as Principal Knittle said that there needs to be a certain number of participating schools or districts. Hawlemont is considering the program.

Chair Loomis asked if it was part of the preschool curriculum, or took over the preschool curriculum. Ms. Baker answered that they would do it as they would like to see it. She said that that question scares a lot of teachers, as they usually would want to weave their programs in. They would need to follow the structure for two years, become certified, and then they could begin mixing the two.

Ms. Danek Burke said that this sounds more academic than normal preschools, and sounds like it would be a lot of work. However, she noted that it sounds like it could integrate well with the current pre-school program. She asked if in a future meeting between the principals in the district, if Principal Knittle could find out if any other schools are interested.

One further issue is that if the school were to pursue this program, Ms. Baker would have to give up some of her "hats", as this would be consuming a considerable amount of time. A question of the cost involved with the program was raised, and Ms. Miller said that over the summer she had looked at it, and it was about \$5,000, but that didn't include time or transportation. Ms. Danek Burke asked if there were any proposals for the current budgeting process, and asked what the time frame was. Principal Knittle said that there would have to be some discussions with Ruth Manna and Kate Dwyer, and possibly see if grants could cover it. Ms. Miller said that the REAP grants might possibly be able to cover this.

Ms. Baker asked if the School Committee might have any insight on the possibility of a full-day of preschool. As the program has both a half-day and a full-day program, it could easily be adapted. As births have decreased in town, there will need to be incentives to bring in students

from other towns. Chair Loomis asked if full-day preschool was normal, and Ms. Baker answered that the Buckland/Shelburne school has it. Chair Loomis asked about whether other schools charge for preschool, and Ms. Baker said that some schools do, some don't. The possibility of having a free morning, paid afternoon program was briefly discussed.

Ms. Danek Burke said she was torn on the subject, as it's a long day, and sometimes hard for kindergarteners, let alone preschoolers. Ms. Baker said that society is changing, and oftentimes children are being picked up only to be brought to another childcare provider, not to their home. Ms. Miller said that kids coming in are not as mentally stimulated in fields like counting, language, and that they're not working on those skills when they go home.

Ms. Tierney said that there is a nationwide trend that children are coming in with less language development and more language issues, as well as self-regulation. She said that she can tell when a child has been to preschool and those that have not. As oral skills are the foundation of reading and writing, it's important that they learn those skills.

Chair Loomis said that the subject was very interesting, but perhaps it should be left to educators to discuss at this point, and then perhaps come back to the School Committee with a plan. Principal Knittle said that he likes the idea of bouncing issues back and forth in the future to get some feedback from the School Committee.

Ms. Danek Burke expressed an opinion that this program could provide a lot of benefits at low cost. As the population is not going to increase in the near future (approximately one Rowe student for the next few years), Rowe needs to maintain programs to draw students in.

Ms. Miller asked if they were to budget for a full-time preschool teacher and an aide (with the other responsibilities Ms. Baker currently has removed), would it be possible to find out soon if that was an appropriate step. Principal Knittle said that he had seen a cost of \$3,500 for training and materials, but that may not include a substitute and other expenses. He said that perhaps it could be added in the coming weeks. Chair Loomis again said that the subject was interesting, but more information would be needed before making any decisions.

Ms. Miller asked if the REAP grant is included in the budget. Ms. Danek Burke said that it's not always in the budget, but in the past REAP funds have been used to fund certain items, but not necessarily planned items. Ms. Miller said that the Committee might want to think about using the REAP grant for salaries.

Ms. Danek Burke said that the TOTM program seems easy, understandable, and straightforward, but she was having difficulty on the issue of whether or not to have a full day of preschool. She asked if the program could be started with a half day and then consider a full day at a later time. Ms. Baker said that she would not be able to do the training and her other "hats", but Principal Knittle said that perhaps the time she uses for her other roles could be used as planning time for the TOTM program, which would result in an increase for the physical education position.

Ski Day: Principal Knittle said that the school had held its second ski day, and had heard from a second grader that it was a 10 on a scale of 1-10. He was amazed at how many volunteers there were and how

much planning goes into it, and how it all works out. Ms. Danek Burke said that she had also spoken to a second grader who is “hooked” on skiing.

Nature’s Classroom/Washington D.C. Trip: Principal Knittle and the 6th Grade teacher are trying to meet with their Heath counterparts for discussion about the Nature’s Classroom (NC) trip, and with their counterparts in Colrain for the Washington D.C. trip.

Ms. Danek Burke said that it appears that it would be easier to coordinate the NC trip, as the two schools would be doing the same things, and that it would be a good trial to see how it works. Principal Knittle said that, in the past, Heath managed to get parents to volunteer to drive. There are eighteen 5th/6th graders. Ms. Morse said that last year, Heath and Colrain went to Washington D.C. together, and that the bus was the only real hitch.

Ms. Miller asked if the parents had to contribute money, which was answered with a “yes”. She said that a lot of parents have to save up for money, so an estimate would be useful soon. Ms. Danek Burke said that there is a relatively decent estimate of how much a family would pay based on how much is budgeted for the trip. Principal Knittle said that it looks like the price for families would only go down from previous years. He said that there may be a parent meeting soon to discuss the trip.

After School Program: Principal Knittle tried to get a meeting together on Tuesday for discussion about an after school program, but only one person showed up. The weather was bad, so he will try to set up a new gathering, as there has been decent interest in a program.

Chair Loomis said that he had received an e-mail from John Diamond, who said that Zoar Outdoor has a drama program that they do with the Heath School. Ms. Baker said that the students have had a chance to participate. Chair Loomis said that he would like to increase the number of chances for students to do things with other schools.

Professional Development: The School is having a writing expert coming on Monday to spend the day with the teachers. This is to get the most out of the writing program that’s used and how best to expand. They arranged to get Stephanie Joyce through the Western Massachusetts Writing Project. Ms. Tierney said that she is looking forward to it, and have already discussed what items they’d like to work on.

LEC Meeting: The Local Education Council (LEC) had a meeting on January 10th. One subject discussed was to have the LEC and School Committee meet to discuss issues. The LEC is in favor, and the School Committee was as well. Principal Knittle will post a joint meeting for February 7th.

PTP: The PTP met and have plans for the upcoming year, including a movie night, potluck supper, etc... There will be a movie night on the 27th. The PTP has been bouncing around ideas for a few months to give families a reason to use the school during the winter. On March 2nd, a game night will be held with a potluck dinner. The goal is to get families to come and spend time together. Ms. Miller joked and asked if the heat would be on, but was well-taken and will be taken care of.

Minutes: The minutes of December 20, 2012 were presented, and approved. Mr. McLatchy requested that the School Committee sign two copies, one for the minutes, and the other for Ms. Blier for an application. After

they were signed by the School Committee, Mr. McLatchy signed one copy as the School Committee Secretary, and Ms. Morse signed and sealed the minutes as Town Clerk.

FY13 Budget: Some smaller issues were addressed on the budget:

Legal Services: Ms. Miller asked about the math of the legal service line item. It read \$3,600, though at the current rate of \$275/month, it should only read \$3,300. This was changed.

Questions: Chair Loomis has a list of questions that he will submit about the budget to Joanne Blier.

Budget Increase: The latest version of the budget proposes a 6% increase. Ms. Danek Burke said that the Committee should work to decrease that. Principal Knittle asked what the likelihood was of it being accepted at the Annual Town Meeting at 6%, and Ms. Danek Burke said that it would ultimately be up to the voters.

When talking about the process, Mr. McLatchy informed the Committee that the legal requirement was that the budget had to be the Town Accountant 90 days before the Annual Town Meeting. The Board of Selectmen had scheduled a preliminary date of February 22nd to review the school budget. Ms. Danek Burke said that the budget needs to be approved soon, as the town needs to have a budget before March, as they had been told in the past that it was not allowed to be in that late.

Principal Knittle said that perhaps the approach would be to try and justify a 6% increase. He also asked what the chance was of having to go back to it after a meeting with the Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee. Chair Loomis said that the Board of Selectmen asked for departments to "build their budget", as opposed to a set increase. He would like to stick with the philosophy of not cutting programs or staff. It's possible, he suggested, that the town may need to do a 2½ override. He hopes it will pass the Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee.

Minutes Taker: Mr. McLatchy asked about his role during the joint meeting with the Board of Selectmen. As a selectman, his first responsibility is to that office, and he questioned what the process would be for taking minutes. Chair Loomis said that in the past, Ellen Miller, who takes the minutes for the Board of Selectmen, usually submitted a set of minutes that was for both committees.

Tech Notice: Principal Knittle will submit a note for The Goal Post asking students interested in Tech to let the school know, for budget planning purposes.

Budget vs. Actual: Ms. Miller requested a budget vs. actual for the current budget.

CIP: This item was not addressed at the last meeting. Chair Loomis wanted to hold it off until the next meeting.

Next Meeting: The School Committee will try to schedule a meeting next week for budget review.

Adjourn: Chair Loomis motioned to adjourn, and was seconded by Ms. Miller. The vote was 3-0 in favor. The meeting was closed at 7:39 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,
Paul McLatchy III

Approved on: _____

Bill Loomis, *Chair*

Lisa Miller, *Vice-Chair*

Lisa Danek Burke-Burke

Attached Documents:

- Agenda
- Principal's Report
- FY13 Budget